



Grantees interested in participating in training workshops and follow-up onsite help may contact Audrey Smolkin (asmolkin@hrsa.gov) for referrals and further information.

June 26, 2001

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

How to deal effectively with the media – that was the question considered in the June 26, 2001 CAP Grantee TA Call. CAP partners who have either had little success in getting the word out about their programs or who are not sure how to go about it participated in a lively discussion seeking direction on this important issue. Sound advice came from speakers Deanna Davis from the Health Improvement Partnership in Spokane, Washington, Michelle Hege of Desautel and Hege, also in Spokane, and Mary Hoppe, a media, communications and marketing consultant from Tampa, Florida.

CAP partners have many reasons to value good press, public relations, news, sound bites, radio and print ads, as well as stories, talk shows, paid spots, and op-eds. Communication with the public brings potential program interest and support, additional clients, improved policy decisions, and, when done well, positive publicity. Unfortunately, when done badly, it can bring negative publicity as well. Consider the following guidelines for developing a successful media relationship:

Bring Good Organization and Thoughtful Attention to Detail to the Media Mix

This is essential. The best way to view working effectively with the media is to see it as a synergistic process. Work to create a mutually beneficial relationship with media contacts who need your input for their stories in the same way you need their help to promote your program. Carefully examine the media planning process and set up your program to capture media attention. Think of this process as a circle that includes your program's promotional goals, newsworthy items sought by your media contacts, and your mutual desire to further the effort of increasing access to health care in your communities. Starting out isn't easy. It takes substantial time and effort to build the kind of personal relationships you seek so that, unless your news gets bumped by a significant major story, you can count on your media contacts to work with you to promote your program's interests.

Create a Media Plan at Least Quarterly

Remember that your plan will not be set in stone. Continuous feedback from previous efforts will impact your plans and cause you to revisit your strategy. Think through your process. What are your goals? What kind of media attention are you seeking? Carefully consider how big "your area" is and how far a field you want to go to accomplish your objectives. If you're in a small town, you'll naturally want to cultivate local reporters, but keep in mind that more sophisticated reporters from bigger news organizations in the nearest city may do more good for your program. Identify the reporters who are most likely to be interested in and continue covering your story, such as health and human-interest section editors. Continually build these relationships, making a concerted effort to stay in touch over time.

Provide Concise Written Material About your Program and How it Fills Gaps in the Safety Net

Always have fact sheets (as well as bulleted fast fact sheets) with current, updated information available for dissemination to interested parties. Imprint this information on your brain in the form of clear, concise talking points, so that you can take advantage of opportunities that arise to promote your program by word of mouth. Always carefully monitor responses to your media stories to determine which strategies have been most effective and which may require fine-tuning for subsequent placements.

Select a Spokesperson Who Will Do Most of the Talking for your Collaborative

But make sure that all partners and other stakeholders understand and support joint program positions so that, if contacted by media representatives, each can access pre-determined talking points and speak with one voice on behalf of your coalition.

Develop a Timely “Hook” When Packaging Stories

Newspapers, TV, radio, and print ads are more successful and memorable with a great story angle. For example, it's graduation time, and you field a story about high school seniors leaving home – what are they going to do about their health care? Or, summer is approaching, and you promote the use of sunglasses for children to avoid the effects of UV rays. Effectively using this approach often makes the difference between the success or failure of your media campaign. If you can manage to make a timely event of your local enrollment activities, the press will be happy to be invited to cover it.

Distill Your Message

Most non-profit media planners have experienced the distillation of a 20-minute interview into a 30-second TV news spot. Particularly when TV is involved, it is imperative to think in terms of sound bites with effective visual cues. Keep your message simple so that it comes across clearly even after a severe edit. Expect to deal with general issue reporters who are not particularly knowledgeable about health care. And always go the extra mile, providing your message in a *brief* written format, such as a press release or fact sheet that can be referred to after the interview ends and the coverage begins.

Customize Your Pitch

Find out all you can about the reporter, the newspaper, the TV show – whatever media contact or vehicle you pursue. We all realize the importance of knowing our audience but may neglect to gain adequate understanding about media contacts and what holds their interest. This aspect of relationship building is critical and builds upon itself to become more valuable over time.

Utilize Your Partners

You may not have media experience personally, but a partner hospital or insurance company is likely to have public relations professionals on their staffs. Work with them to take advantage of their expertise. Likewise, work with other community organizations that share your agenda, underscoring that health care is an issue that is of interest to everyone in the community. Do whatever you can to maintain high visibility so that when your media contact needs a story, you and your organization will immediately come to mind.

Personalize Your Program by Devising Many Kinds of Stories

Find creative ways to educate your community about your program agenda. Consider using a business angle, or a technology angle, or work to explode stereotypes by

drawing attention to the working poor in your community who lack even basic health insurance. Develop your own case studies to demonstrate ways your program is prepared to help community members in need. Explore the perspective of local caregivers, highlighting the efforts of local doctors, nurses and volunteers. Work proactively to build genuine interest in the medical marvels your collaboration supports on a routine basis.

The media can become your most effective partner in informing community members about the important work being done through CAP collaborations. Too often, caring health and human service workers assume that their daily efforts are simply a function of their job, neglecting to appreciate the critical importance of the services they provide. But improving the health and the quality of life of fellow community members is more than just a job or even a vocation. However routine, it remains among the most newsworthy events on our planet. Working in close relationship with local and national media contacts may be the most effective way to keep stakeholders abreast of these critical community concerns, increasing awareness and compassionate concern as well as access to care and helping to ensure the continued funding required to continue this important work.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA CALL PARTICIPANTS:

Name	Organization
Amy Bartels	Arizona Board of Regents, University of AZ
Angelique Raptakis	Management Assistance Corporation
Anne Kircher	Sangre de Cristo Community Health Partnership, NM
Becky Walsdorf	University of Texas Medical Branch
Ben Graimer	HOST
Benny Samuels	Community Voices - Denver
Betsy Buser	Indigent Care Collaboration, Austin TX
Brenda Theus	Shelby County Health Care Corp., TN
Bruce Amundson	Community Choice
Carolyn Emanuel	Family Health Center, SC
Cheryl Duran	Health & Hospital Corporation of Marion County CAP
Cheryl McInerney	Cambridge Health Alliance
Christie Bordeaux	HOST
Christine Perfili	Utah Department of Health
Crystal Welch	Valley Health Systems, Inc., WV
Dave Fant	Shenandoah-Potomac CAP
Deanna Davis	HOST
Debbie Bardin	Hudson Headwaters Health Network
Dee Dee Wendland	Rural Health Network, Binghamton NY
Dennis Williams	NC Department of Health and Human Services, Pitts County
Doak Bloss	Ingham County Health Department
Elizabeth Baxter	HRSA State Planning Grant on Universal Coverage
Elizabeth Fehsenfeld	Healthy Futures
Ellen R. Shaffer	
Erin Grace	Primary Care Coalition Montgomery County, MD
Eunice Dorst	Community Health Council, Manhattan KS
George E. Ricks, Sr.	Erlanger Health System, TN

Holly Trimbur	Coordinated Care Network, PA
Jason Ladner	Community Health Council, Manhattan KS
Jesus Hernandez	Community Choice
Jo Paulla Baca	First Choice Community Healthcare, Inc.
Joanne Omi	NY City Health & Hospital
Joe Kanewske	University of Texas Medical Branch
John Cragin	Boston Medical Center
Judith Passmore	Middlesex CAP
Judy Szalapski	Hennepin County Medical Center, MN CAP
Kari Lundgren	Southeast Alaska Regional Health
Katherine Schneider	Middlesex Health System, Inc., CT
Kathy Hungness	Prime West Health System, MN
Kay Freeman	Leon County, FL
Kim Beggs	Comprehensive Community Health Initiative, IL
Linda Potts	Comprehensive Community Health Initiative, IL
Linda Davis	KC CareLink
Linda Decker	Lighthouse Health Access Alliance
Lisa Craig	HOST
Luanne Nyberg	Hennepin County Medical Center, MN
Lynn Evans-Reister	Inova Health Care Services, Fairfax VA
Maia Gaillard	Martha's Vineyard Hospital
Margaret Flinter	Middlesex Hospitals
Mary Hoppe	HOST
Mayra Matos	Westchester Prepaid Health Services
Melanie Matney	Palmetto Health Alliance
Michelle Davis	Shenandoah-Potomac CAP
Michelle Hegge	Desautel Hege Communications (HIP Spokane) Deanna
Michelle Sawyer	NC Department of Health and Human Services, Pitts County
Michelle Soto	Brooklyn Alliance
Mike DeLucca	FL CAP
Nancy Dumont	Bi-State Primary Care
Paul Freundlich	Middlesex CAP
Ray Knight	Family Health Centers, Inc., SC
Robyn Zyrk	Primary Care Coalition, MD
Ron Cookston	Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services
Ron Beattie	HOST
Ruth Woolum	SKYCAP Hazzard
Sandra McCollum	First Choice Community Healthcare, Inc.
Seema Verma	Health & Hospital Corporation of Marion County CAP
Sharon Morris	Health Care Coalition of Southern Oregon
Sid Cato	Natividad Medical Center
Stacey Johnson	HOST
Susan Podolsky	Neighborhood Health Care Network
Tammy Eberly	Tiahoga CAP
Tammy Stoltz	PCAP Pima CAP
Tina Dixon	NC Dept HHS, Pitts County
Toby Douglas	San Mateo County
Tom Lewis	MD CAP
Tom Butts	Jefferson County Department of Health

Tom Irons	NC CAP
Tom Irons	NC Department of Health and Human Services, Pitts County
Virginia Brooks	CHOICE Regional Health Network
William Bateman	South Manhattan Healthcare Network, Health and Hospitals Corporation
Synthesis Writers	Synthesis Professional Services

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